

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6286

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LUSAKA 2313

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: XGDS-1

SUBJ: ZAMBIA TO POSTPONE 1978 ELECTIONS?

REF: LUSAKA 2285 (NOTAL)

1. AS REPORTED IN REFTEL, LENGTHY UNSIGNED ARTICLE ENTITLED "WHYTHE VOTE APATHY?" APPEARED IN AUGUST 4 EDITION OF ZAMBIA DAILY MAIL, THE LUSAKA PAPER CONSIDERED TO REFLECT GOVERNMENTAL THINKING. MAIN THRUST OF ARIICLE PROVIDED WELL REASONED RATIONALE FOR POSTPONEMENT OF 1978 NATIONAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

REASONS, IN BRIEF, ARE AS FOLLOWS:

--ZAMBIANS HAVE BEEN TURNING OUT TO VOTE IN DIMINISHING NUMBERS SINCE INDEPENDENCE. THIS APATHY PLUS INTERNAL UNREST HAVE PRODUCED A DANGEROUS INTERNAL SITUATION. SOME PEOPLE PLAN ON TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THIS SITUATION IN 1978 AND ARE ALREADY GRIPPED WITH "UNPRECEDENTED ELECTION FEVER" AND ARE RAISING "VOCIFEROUS AND DISCORDANT VOICES."

--ZAMBIA'S UNFORTUNATE GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION, ESPECIALLY THE RHODESIAN WAR IN THE SOUTH, HAS CAUSED ENORMOUS ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AND PRESENTED THE DANGER OF A MILITARY INVASION FROM THE SOUTH.

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THESE TWO FACTORS HAVE LED TO A FULL STATE OF EMERGENCY AND TOTAL WAR FOOTING. ZAMBIA DOES NOT HAVE A NORMAL PEACETIME SITUATION IN 1977 AND MAY NOT EXPECT ANY CHANGE BY THE SCHEDULED ELECTION PERIOD NEXT YEAR.

--NO DEMOCRACY CAN HOLD ELECTIONS AT A TIME OF EMERGENCY AND PROVISION FOR POSTPONING ELECTIONS UNDER WARTIME CONDITIONS IS PROVIDED FOR IN THE CONSTITUTION. EVEN DEMOCRATIC BRITAIN

POSTPONED ELECTIONS TWICE IN THIS CENTURY AND ZAMBIA IS IN A SIMILAR POSITION.

--PRESIDENT KAUNDA IS ATTACKING THE MAIN PROBLEMS OF STATE: SHORTAGES, INEFFICIENCY, CORRUPTION, INFLATION, ECT., AND WOULD BE SERIOUSLY HAMPERED IF HE ALSO HAD TO ENGAGE IN ELECTIONEERING NEXT YEAR.

--ZAMBIA IS APPROACHING A CRISIS POINT; IF THE ULTIMATE CHOICE RESTS BETWEEN NATIONAL SURVIVAL AND PERSONAL FREEDOMS IN 1978, THE ELECTION OPTION WILL HAVE TO WAIT.

--WHAT ZAMBIA LACKS AT THE PRESENT TIME IS SUFFICIENT WILL OF THE PEOPLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WHAT SOCIAL SERVICES THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED. THE GOVERNMENT HAS DONE ITS JOB AND CHANGES, IN ADDITION TO PRESIDENT KAUNDA'S CAMPAIGN AND ACTION AGAINST MINISTERIAL ABUSE, ARE NOT NECESSARY AT THIS TIME.

2. COMMENT: FOR MONTHS THERE HAS BEEN SPECULATION THAT KAUNDA AND RANKING UNIP OFFICIALS MIGHT DECIDE TO POSTPONE THE NATIONAL ELECTION DUE IN 1978, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST SEMI-AUTHORITATIVE INDICATION THAT A POSTPONEMENT MAY BE IN THE WIND. THIS ARTICLE WAS PROBABLY PENNED BY HIGH RANKING OFFICIALS, MOST LIKELY PRIME MINISTER MAINZA CHONA, AND CERTAINLY NOT WITHOUT A GREEN LIGHT FROM KAUNDA. ZAMBIA IS A ONE-PARTY STATE AND IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT KAUNDA, AS THE ONLY CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY, COULD BE VOTED OUT OF OFFICE. HOWEVER, HE COULD FEEL THE CONFIDENTIAL

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STING OF REPRIMAND. IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR KAUNDA TO CLAIM A POPULAR MANDATE IF A LOW PERCENTAGE OF THE ELECTORATE TURNED UP AT THE POLLS IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND, GIVEN THE STATE VOTER APATHY CITED IN THIS ARTICLE, THIS IS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY. THE PROSPECT OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, IS WHAT FRIGHTENS PARTY STALWARTS IN THE CABINET AND PARLIAMENT. THE DANGER HERE IS THAT SENIOR PARTY OFFICIALS, HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY, COULD BE BEATEN BY RELATIVELY UNKNOWNNS AND IN SOME CASES ONLY NOMINAL CARD-CARRYING UNIP MEMBERS WHO MANAGE TO GET ON THE SLATE OF CANDIDATES. THE PROSPECT OF DEFEAT IS INDEED FRIGHTENING FOR THE OLD LINE PARTY FIGURES, MANY OF WHOM HAVE NO MARKETABLE SKILLS OUTSIDE POLITICS. THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO ADVISE

CAUTION UPON KAUNDA UNLESS THE ELECTIONS CAN BE TURNED INTO A SURE THING. TO AVOID THE RISK OF LOSING PERSONAL PRESTIGE AND IN THE INTEREST OF PRESERVING HIS PARTY FROM TAKING A SEVERE BATTERING AT THE POLLS, KAUNDA MAY WELL DECIDE TO POSTPONE NATIONAL ELECTIONS UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE ECONOMY IS IN BETTER SHAPE AND RHODESIA RESOLVED.
LOW

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